

Fall forecast

Martha Uniacke Breen, *National Post* · Oct. 8, 2010 | Last Updated: Oct. 8, 2010 1:05 PM ET

A new emphasis on relaxed and livable is sweeping into Canadian interiors for fall. As the air begins to cool and we move inside to cozy up for the winter months ahead, we'll be surrounding ourselves with rich, warm colours, strong natural textures and fibres, and self-confidence about expressing ourselves through the way we feather our nests.

“People are turning back to their homes,” says Cambridge, Ont., designer Tami VanDyke. “But I’m finding they’re preferring a steady evolution — not having the whole room done over, but constantly updating.”

Many of fall’s most directional trends are adaptable in this way, through layering new fabrics and accessories on to an existing scheme, adding zip with the introduction of bright pillows or artwork, creating a new backdrop through richly coloured wall paints or wallpapers (predicted to re-emerge significantly in the coming seasons), or refinishing, reupholstering or repainting what we already have.

Design, like fashion, moves in cycles, and is often affected by economics — as with the old truism about hemlines going up in good times and down in bad, so too does design tend to become more comforting and personal when the economy is sluggish. There’s a strictly business aspect as well as aesthetic reasons for this, observes Toronto designer David Overholt. “The recession tends to affect consumers’ (and designers’) ability to see new stuff, since companies tend to pull back on new introductions until times get better. But it also has a positive effect as well: Since people spend more time at home, they’re looking around and want to fix things up. It’s a great time to renovate, since the trades are hungry for work and you can often get deals.”

Also, good design has never been more accessible; big box stores and mass market retailers such as Urban Outfitters, Home Depot, Winner’s, and the like have brought sophisticated design to penny-pinched consumers. What started with Costco’s bargain-priced Alessi-designed

teapot a few years ago has become a continent-wide trend, and the hotel-style, over-disciplined, anonymous room is so last year.

Also, do-it-yourself is back in vogue, not only because it costs less than having a piece (or a room) done professionally, but because it reflects a new emphasis on individual style and taste, and because we're becoming ingrained with the idea of reduce, reuse, recycle as an environmental responsibility. "Vintage" (that is, pieces that are not old enough, or valuable enough, to be called antiques) is a feature in both contemporary and traditional interiors, and the quirkier the better; refurbished flea-market treasures, spruced up with paint, stripped or re-upholstered, are very chic.

Fashion ready-to-wear tends to inspire interior design, and the cycle from the runway to the design showroom is getting shorter. For Toronto designer Tommy Smythe, one of fall's most important fashion trends, the military look, is coming to interior design as well. "We're seeing a range of neutral palettes that are associated with the military: khaki, olive, battleship grey, camel beige. What's great about this palette is that all of these colours go together naturally, but they also look great with many other materials and colours, such as metals, wood grain and even bright accents." These colours, Mr. Smythe says, can be used in any intensity, from very rich, dark shades for a den or library, to very pale and washed out for a bedroom or family room.

Texture is a large part of all of fall's looks, always interesting in a low-colour interior. "Baskets, blankets, skins and furs, as well as strong woven textures, and wood grains are huge, but everything is soft, not harsh or overstrong," Ms. VanDyke says. Animal prints are metamorphosing into horn, shagreen (sharkskin), embossed leather, faux-fur and shag. These can either be sophisticated and sleek, as with leather and suede, or have an element of fun or whimsy, depending on how and where they are used.

Along with natural fibres, wood grain is very pronounced, often highlighted with bleaching or pickling or rubbed and stained. In fact, it's set to be so important that it may appear in other materials, such as wallpaper. "It's interesting to see how far it's going to go, such as vinyl wallpaper that looks like wood panelling," Mr. Overholt says. "I'm curious to see if it will become really big, just as animal prints did."

Restoration Hardware's latest catalogue embraces what's being called the "Belgian-country" look so wholeheartedly, it's almost overkill. Fortunately, the style is so laid back and adaptable that, whether your budget is high or low, its elements can be incorporated attractively into almost any interior. "Belgian country features lots of natural fibres, linens, highly grained woods, not a lot of strong pattern," says Toronto designer Sloan Mauran. "Woods are often washed out, with pickled or bleached finishes; it's a very relaxed, calm look."

One of the most distinctive features of this look is its warm, muted colour palette: warm greys such as stone, slate and linen, softened chocolate brown, complex off-whites. In

this sepia-toned setting, natural textures like distressed wood, suede, furniture with exposed nailheads and other hardware, and metal accents with matte or semi-matte surfaces come to the fore. “It’s all a very authentic, organic feeling; back to basics, warm and comforting,” Ms. Mauran says.

Contemporary interiors are looking back to the ’60s (also, in part, a reflection of fashion), but shorn of some of the wilder, more optimistic excesses of that decade. The influence of shows like *Mad Men*, is refamiliarizing us with how interesting the period was in design. Again, however, most designers don’t foresee a wholesale recreation of 1960s rooms, but rather incorporating some of the elements of that period, according to individual taste. For example, classic mid-century modern furniture can look equally attractive in a modern room or combined with more traditional elements, while colours can either be assertively bright, or tempered with grey or beige undertones. Pattern, especially geometrics, is strong in fabrics: think Marimekko, if not Andy Warhol.

Traditional interiors are feeling the breeze of both the return to colour and a nod to design of the twentieth century. “The whole ‘Hollywood Regency’ look — harking back to Dorothy Draper and David Hicks, glamour, is back,” says Ms. Mauran. Designers such as Kelly Wearstler, with her Vegas-chic, very decorated look, adds a sense of personality to rooms that feature otherwise fairly formal elements. Colour appears in this look, too, but often as a backdrop. “If you’re going for colour in a room like this, it might be in a more classic, English interpretation,” observes Mr. Smythe. “You might use Farrow & Ball’s Orangerie, which is a muddier orange-yellow, on the walls, then put very high-quality antiques and furnishings with it.”

But the overriding trend — common to all these looks, and very much in keeping with a softer economy — is the idea of layering and combining different elements, periods and styles, into a look that is unique to the individual vision of the owner, whether eccentric and high-spirited, classic and comfortable, or a blend of all these things.

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